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IBN ‘ASAKIR’S REPRESENTATIONS OF SYRIA AND DAMASCUS IN THE INTRODUCTION TO THE *TA’RIKH MADINAT DIMASHQ*

In his landmark study of historiography in the Islamic world, Franz Rosenthal identified the biographical dictionary associated with a particular locality and prefaced by a topographical introduction as a characteristic form of “theological local historiography.”¹ What Rosenthal described as the “theological” nature of these dictionaries relates to their origins in hadith scholarship, a field of religious studies devoted to preserving an accurate record of the sayings and actions of the Prophet and his Companions passed down orally through an unbroken and authentic chain of trustworthy transmitters. Thus, the original motivation for composing such works, the earliest extant example of which dates to the 9th century,² was to catalogue hadith scholars who had lived in a city to facilitate the assessment of their plausibility as transmitters of particular traditions. Furthermore, as expressions of local pride, these dictionaries allowed Muslims to celebrate the contribution made in their town to the sustenance of the most authoritative body of knowledge, after the Qur’an, in Islam. Although by the 10th century these works began to include notables who embodied a city’s political, literary, and economic claims to fame, the defining feature of the majority of the biographical entries remained the individual’s engagement with the religious sciences, particularly hadith studies.

Rosenthal had little to say, however, about the specific function or contents of the topographical introduction that, along with the toponym in the title of the work, most clearly supplied the local biographical dictionary with its “local” nature. The implication was that the introduction should be seen as a self-explanatory convention of the genre, meant simply to highlight the connection of the biographies to a particular locality. Other scholars have interpreted these introductions cursorily as expressions of local pride and mined them for factual detail to reconstruct the physical layout of a city at a particular moment in time.³ By contrast, this article situates the topographical introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* (History of the City of Damascus), a monumental 12th-century biographical dictionary by the scion of a prominent family of Damascene Shafi‘i scholars, Abu al-Qasim ‘Ali ibn ‘Asakir (d. 1176), in a comparative context and analyzes it as a constructed and contingent representation, a study in “place.” This analysis sheds new light on the ways in which Ibn ‘Asakir’s introduction differed from those

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preceding it, namely that of the *Ta'rikh Baghdad*, a 10th-century biographical dictionary of Baghdad, as well as from earlier representations of Syria and Syrian cities in other types of literature. It also revises characterizations of the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* in recent scholarship as a tribute to “biblical Syria” and of Ibn ‘Asakir as a propagandist for Jerusalem’s centrality to Syria and to Islam. Rather, Ibn ‘Asakir’s introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* inscribed a strictly Islamic cover story on the physically vague “al-Sham” and celebrated the physically distinct “Dimashq” as its sacred and secular center.

A DISCOURSE OF PLACE

The concept of place has acted as an important category of analysis in the fields of anthropology, geography, and literary criticism in recent years.⁴ In the simplest terms, place may be defined as “space to which meaning has been ascribed”⁵; and one way of ascribing meaning to space is to represent it in writing. Thus, examining representations of spaces—limited here to towns and territories—in the written record of a society over a period of time reveals culturally and historically specific meanings and yields insight into peoples’ relationships to political and social realities. The proliferation of representations of Syria and Syrian cities in Arabic literature over the course of the 12th to the 14th centuries, for instance, may be interpreted as a “discourse of place,” the historical significance of which is attested by the fact that it was engaged, and in so doing transformed, by many of the prominent intellectuals of the age.⁶ The changing terms of this discourse act as significant clues for the reconstruction of a “politics of belonging” among Muslim intellectuals, loyalties and identities being expressed and contested through the idiom of place. The introduction to Ibn ‘Asakir’s *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, one of the largest scale city-based biographical dictionaries ever undertaken in the Arabic language, constitutes an ideal source for this type of reconstruction because it communicates what it meant, for at least one well-known Damascene scholar, to belong in Syria or in Damascus during the extreme sectarian conflicts of the 12th century.

A discourse of place can be discerned in a broader context for the medieval Islamic world. Representations of cities and regions in the Arabic written record began to appear in the 8th and 9th centuries in the form of local chronicles, local biographical dictionaries, and geographies.⁷ Many of these works, as Rosenthal observed, contained introductions or individual chapters dedicated to topographical descriptions of the built and natural environment and/or to enumerations of the “merits” (*faḍā'il*) of a particular town or territory, usually taken from the hadith and related exegetical, legendary, and historical material.⁸ Such *faḍā'il* treatises and topographies, usually as part of larger works although occasionally on their own, formed the backbone of the discourse of place as it matured from the 9th through the 11th centuries. In the middle of the 11th century, this discourse reached a culmination in the *Ta'rikh Baghdad*, a multivolume biographical dictionary prefaced by a *faḍā'il* cum topography of the city of Baghdad penned by the hadith scholar and Baghdad resident al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071).

As did al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, whose work served as the model for generations of biographers to come, Ibn ‘Asakir combined a *faḍā'il* treatise and a topography in the

introduction to his 12th-century dictionary. The format of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* therefore reflected established practice in the broad-based discourse of place up to its time. In contrast, the content of the introduction owed a debt to more local representatives of the discourse. Independent *faḍā'il* treatises on Jerusalem and Damascus survive from the 11th century, and the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* can be seen as both testimonial to and departure from this literature.⁹ Thus, Ibn 'Asakir engaged a discourse of place that was already established in Syria and in the Islamic world more broadly. Despite his use of the conventions and terms of this discourse, however, the historically contingent perspective from which Ibn 'Asakir constructed representations of Syria and Damascus in the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* distinguished him from earlier participants in the discourse and heralded a period of close association between a discourse of place in and about Syria and a politics of belonging in the region.

SYRIA AS PLACE: IBN 'ASAKIR'S *FADĀ'IL AL-SHAM*

Unlike earlier works engaging a discourse of place in the Islamic world, Ibn 'Asakir's introduction did not claim Syrian exceptionalism on the basis of the sanctity conferred by a pre-Islamic pantheon or the city of Jerusalem. Instead, the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* opened with the territory referred to as "al-Sham," the ill-defined borders of which justified the inclusion of the biographies of more than 10,000 individuals with some association to the territory, and the narrowly defined Islamic pedigree of which signaled the exclusion of heterodox groups from belonging, not only in Ibn 'Asakir's biographical dictionary, but also, by implication, in the territory itself. This representation of "al-Sham," which took the form of a *faḍā'il* treatise, occupied the first half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* and stood out most obviously because of its great length.¹⁰ Although in some ways this meant that Ibn 'Asakir simply included more of everything than did his predecessors, an analysis of his "strategies of selection, of placement, and of repetition," to borrow Fred Donner's methodology, reveals patterns in the compilation of material.¹¹ Where Ibn 'Asakir furnished multiple versions of a single tradition or repeated the same versions with different chains of transmission, he was both showing himself to be a thorough hadith scholar and highlighting that particular material. This strategy of repetition was combined with strategies of selection, which make clear Ibn 'Asakir did not include all traditions relevant to Syria in circulation by his time, nor did he treat them all with equal meticulousness. Finally, strategies of placement prompted Ibn 'Asakir to place those traditions he wished to emphasize in more prominent locations in the lengthy work. Paying attention to these strategies of compilation makes it possible to suggest some general tendencies in Ibn 'Asakir's representation of "al-Sham" and to interpret these tendencies in light of the historical context.

In addition to its size, Ibn 'Asakir's *faḍā'il* was distinguished most clearly by the scale at which it represented the locality. The first half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* was concerned much more with the entity referred to as "al-Sham" than it was with the eponymous city of "Dimashq," the author's hometown.¹² Ibn 'Asakir did not exert much effort establishing the exact proportions of "al-Sham," but his use of the more specific toponym "Dimashq" in the title and throughout the

work suggests that “al-Sham” should not be seen here as a synonym for Damascus, as is often the case in modern usage.¹³ Ibn ‘Asakir may have deliberately played on a certain ambiguity, however, leaving the physical referent for “al-Sham” unclear in order to justify the inclusion of as many biographical entries as possible without explicitly diverting the focus from his hometown. Overall, however, clues in the text indicate that he intended “al-Sham” primarily to refer to a larger, regional entity. Most conspicuously, Ibn ‘Asakir cited Qur’anic exegesis that relates “al-Sham” to God’s blessed or holy land lying between the town of al-‘Arish on the border with Egypt in the southwest and the Euphrates River in the northeast, two of the borders given to the region of Syria in 9th- and 10th-century Arabic geographies.¹⁴ Because of the generally larger scale at which Ibn ‘Asakir represented “al-Sham,” it will be translated in this article as “Syria,” shorthand for the region often called “Greater Syria” or the “Bilad al-Sham.”¹⁵

Representing localities at the scale of the region was unusual in terms of the discourse of place already established across the Islamic world. The topographical introduction to al-Khatib al-Baghdadi’s *Ta’rikh Baghdad*, for instance, virtually ignored Iraq as a region.¹⁶ Moreover, while the 11th-century *faḍā’il* treatises on Jerusalem situated the Holy City in the context of its hinterland, their emphasis was clearly Jerusalem proper and, more specifically, the walled sanctuary within the city.¹⁷ The 11th-century *faḍā’il* of Damascus by ‘Ali al-Rabā‘ī (d. 1052), from which Ibn ‘Asakir borrowed extensively, devoted only about a fifth of the text to “al-Sham”; the rest explicitly referred to Damascus and its environs.¹⁸ In fact, by the 12th century, individual cities had appeared much more frequently and vividly in Arabic writing, with the notable exceptions of world geographies and *faḍā’il* treatises on Egypt, than had regions.¹⁹ What this suggests is that Ibn ‘Asakir saw a particular need to address Syria as a region and to uphold it as a coherent and cohesive territory, united in a single identity and destiny.

Ibn ‘Asakir’s emphasis on the region can be interpreted as an aspiration, consistent with the aspirations of the leadership of his day, toward a politically unified, Muslim-controlled Syria. As mentioned earlier, however, Ibn ‘Asakir did not represent Syria in terms of clearly defined borders. In addition to facilitating the inclusion of as many individuals as possible in the biographical dictionary, this vague rendering of Syria reflected the lack of an established political entity coterminous with an identifiable regional territory during Ibn ‘Asakir’s lifetime. Nonetheless, after Nur al-Din, the Zangid prince of Aleppo, assumed control of Damascus in 1154, successfully wooing the city’s elites in the process, Ibn ‘Asakir and his peers may have looked toward him not only as a patron but also as a potential unifier of Syria. By his death in 1174, Nur al-Din had brought extensive territories, including Syria’s two largest cities, under the aegis of a single regime headquartered in Damascus, a political configuration not seen since the 8th century. The Crusader states were still firmly entrenched along the Mediterranean coast, however, and Shi‘i challenges to Nur al-Din’s suzerainty from extremist Isma‘ili cells in Syria and the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt kept political and religious unity under the Zangids a fragile reality at best. Nevertheless, for Damascene Sunni intellectuals like Ibn ‘Asakir, the concept of Syria as a regional polity united under a staunchly Sunni leadership may have finally seemed tantalizingly realizable.

Ibn ‘Asakir favored material highlighting the region’s Islamic past to communicate these political aspirations in the opening *faḍā’il* of the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq*.

Prominently placed traditions attributed to the Prophet and his Companions emphasize Syria's importance in the expansion of Islam. After the conventional introductory sections on etymology, Ibn 'Asakir furnished the longest litany of variants of a single hadith in the entire *faḍā'il*, a hadith that celebrates Syria as the premier destination for the warrior immigrants of early Islam.²⁰ In this hadith, the Prophet Muhammad predicts the future: "Armies will be dispatched, one to Syria, one to Iraq, and one to Yemen." This foreshadowing of the incipient conquest period draws an enthusiastic response from the Companion 'Abd Allah ibn Hawala al-Azdi (d. 678 or 699), "Oh Messenger of God, choose one for me!" At this, the Prophet replies, "Go to Syria." Then he adds, "May whoever refuses stay in his Yemen and draw water from its streams; verily, God has vouchsafed Syria and its people to me." This well-attested tradition appeared frequently in earlier hadith collections and *faḍā'il* treatises,²¹ and Wilferd Madelung has interpreted the extent of its circulation as evidence of Umayyad-era support for the continuing obligation among Muslims to perform the *hijra*, or pious migration, and thus to join the ranks of recruits in Syria for wars against the Byzantine Empire.²² The meticulous repetition of this tradition and its placement so far toward the beginning of the work suggest that Ibn 'Asakir considered its message particularly important, even urgent. Madelung argued that by the Abbasid period "the *hijra* as a practical institution . . . came to an end."²³ It appears, however, that Ibn 'Asakir was seeking to revive it. Though the enemies had changed, Ibn 'Asakir still saw Syria as a region threatened by outsiders—European and Byzantine Christians and Isma'ili Shi'is—against whom rightly guided Muslims should fight.

To reinforce this representation of Syria as the most important testing ground for early Islam, Ibn 'Asakir called on the historical narratives of the 7th century and, in so doing, evoked parallels with the realities of the 12th century. Although a detailed examination of the more than 200 pages devoted to the history of the Islamic conquest of Syria is beyond the scope of this article, the sheer size of this freighted interlude begs for comment.²⁴ Accounts of the conquest or foundation of a city or region by the armies of Islam had become standard components of *faḍā'il* compilations throughout the Islamic world by Ibn 'Asakir's time. However, the length and comprehensiveness of his conquest section—from the early raids conducted during the lifetime of the Prophet to the siege of Damascus, from the defeat of the Byzantines at the Battle of Yarmouk to arrangements for the administration and taxation of the region—rendered it unusual as a mere convention of the *faḍā'il* format. Situated as it was after the more thematic opening sections of the *faḍā'il*, Ibn 'Asakir's conquest chronicle celebrated Syrian particularism by distilling from the universalist narratives of the foundation and expansion of the Islamic community the episodes that were played out on Syrian soil. Ibn 'Asakir may have intended this chronicle to stir the collective memory of his contemporaries in the hopes that past victories in the name of Islam might inspire future ones against the threats to incipient Syrian unity under Zangid leadership.

Ibn 'Asakir also played on another kind of collective memory: the history of the future.²⁵ The collection of traditions predicting a sequence of events leading to the apocalypse had constituted a distinct, though relatively marginal, branch of hadith studies since the early Islamic period.²⁶ Like that of his predecessors, Ibn 'Asakir's invocation of apocalyptic hadith suggests an investment in looking toward the future to an ultimate triumph against enemies whose exact identities—Shi'is and Crusaders, for

instance—might be superimposed by his audience on the inexact language of prophecy. Immediately after the opening litany of variants of the conquest hadith discussed earlier, Ibn ‘Asakir moved to another long litany, this time of variants of a tradition in which the Prophet relates a dream vision on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘As (d. 684): “Verily, I saw my bookstand lifted from under my cushion. I followed it with my eyes, and lo! There was a light shining from it towards Syria. Indeed, when the time of the trials comes, true faith will be in Syria.”²⁷ The fact that this hadith was transmitted by the son of the great conquest-era conqueror of Egypt, ‘Amr ibn al-‘As, made its failure to name Egypt, under a Shi‘i regime for most of Ibn ‘Asakir’s life, as the bastion of true faith at the end of time a subtext for its bestowal of such a distinction on a Sunni Syria.²⁸ Other apocalyptic traditions defend Syria against criticism from, it is implied, Shi‘i sources, such as the following prophecy in the words of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, whose legitimacy as caliph was challenged by a Syrian faction at the Battle of Siffin in 657: “At the end of time there will be a civil war in which the people will be mined just as gold is mined out of ore. So do not insult Syrians [in general]! Insult only their traitors. For truly, among them are the Substitutes (*abdāl*).”²⁹ Thus, ‘Ali, whose contested succession prompted a split in the Islamic community that led to the establishment of Shi‘ism among his supporters, defends the region that rejected him as host to the divinely privileged Substitutes who would fight on the side of truth at the end of time. The implications of this prediction—not only exonerating Syria for Siffin but also installing the wronged ‘Ali as its champion—allowed Ibn ‘Asakir to co-opt ‘Ali for Syria and for Sunnism in the face of Syria’s Shi‘i enemies.³⁰

Ibn ‘Asakir also quoted many apocalyptic traditions that, read in the context of 12th-century Syria, conjure up images of another enemy of the emerging Zangid state, the Crusaders. The following hadith, which appears in numerous variants throughout the *faḍā’il*, would likely have reminded Ibn ‘Asakir and his fellow Damascene elites of confrontations between Crusader and Muslim armies outside Jerusalem and, more recently, outside Damascus: “The Prophet said, ‘A band from my community will remain fighting at and around the gates of Damascus and at and around the gates of Jerusalem; desertion will not impair their efforts, and they will remain victorious in the name of the truth until the Day of Judgment.’”³¹ Other apocalyptic traditions also suggest a Christian enemy on Syrian soil. Ibn ‘Asakir emphasized material featuring the second coming of the Prophet ‘Isa ibn Maryam, or the Islamic Jesus, and linking him not only directly to Syria, where he would descend upon a white minaret on the eastern side of Damascus, but also to Islam.³² The first half of the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* concludes with a section describing the “Dajjāl,” a monstrous apocalyptic figure who would arrive on Earth to spread temptation and turmoil before Jesus’s second coming.³³ Situated as it was immediately following the more than 200 page conquest chronicle, this section reinforced a continuity between past and future in the representation of Syria as host to the primal conflicts and final resolutions of the Islamic community. It also reinforced an image of Jesus as an Islamic prophet, leading the Muslim community against the infidels, who were identified specifically in these chapters as, among others, Christians and Jews.³⁴

The first half of the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq*, therefore, represented Syria by portraying past and future threats to its territorial and spiritual integrity as the enemies of Islam in general. Ibn ‘Asakir wielded the full arsenal of early Islamic

historiography—Prophetic and apocalyptic hadith, conquest-era narratives and reports, Qur’anic exegesis—to emphasize the role Syria played and would continue to play in safeguarding the righteous from corruption and infidelity. This representation of Syria showcased Ibn ‘Asakir’s skills as an accomplished, and relatively conservative, member of the ulama.³⁵ In line with this conservatism was Ibn ‘Asakir’s departure from the emphasis on pre-Islamic history that had marked the discourse of place in and about Syria up to his time. One of the peculiarities of the *faḍā’il* literature on Syria preceding the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* was the depth of its historical vision, drawing heavily from a reservoir of para-biblical lore circulating in the region to evoke the *longue durée* of the monotheistic tradition.³⁶ The treatises on Jerusalem in particular moved almost seamlessly from the days of David and Solomon and the Temple Mount to the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem and the construction of the Dome of the Rock.³⁷ By contrast, the scarce material featuring pre-Islamic prophets and historical figures in the first half of the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* is completely overwhelmed by the mass of material privileging episodes from the early Islamic period and interlocutors from the ranks of the Prophet’s Companions and Successors.³⁸ The fact that Ibn ‘Asakir’s volumes of biographies include entries for pre-Islamic prophets has been interpreted in recent scholarship as evidence of his particular interest in the pre-Islamic past and its relationship to Syria.³⁹ However, recalling the importance of strategies of selection, repetition, and placement, Ibn ‘Asakir’s choice to exclude much of this material from the opening *faḍā’il* of the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq*, especially in contrast to its privileged position in an earlier discourse of place, suggests a deliberate downplaying of pre-Islamic history and legend in representing Syria.⁴⁰

In the context of the 12th-century conflicts with Christian Crusaders, Ibn ‘Asakir’s reluctance to embrace “biblical Syria” as an integral part of his representation is understandable, although, as mentioned earlier, he did highlight eschatological traditions featuring Jesus.⁴¹ Ibn ‘Asakir’s inclusion of Jesus in the opening *faḍā’il* of the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* in any capacity is striking in the context of his relative neglect therein of other pre-Islamic prophets, historical figures, and the tales of their exploits in Syria. However, the portrayal of Jesus in a strictly apocalyptic role was characteristic of the field of hadith studies as it had evolved by the 12th century and as exemplified by conservative ulama like Ibn ‘Asakir. As Tarif Khalidi explains, “When the Hadith texts came to be edited and standardized in authoritative and carefully arranged and divided collections . . . the Jesus of the eschaton survived, but not the Jesus of the ‘biblical’ materials.”⁴² Not only was the “Jesus of the eschaton” acceptable to a strict hadith scholar, but he could also be linked directly to Syria, allowing Ibn ‘Asakir to reconcile his rigorous training with his Syrian particularism.⁴³ The repetition of some of these traditions later in the biographical entry for Jesus only served to underscore the importance of this material to Ibn ‘Asakir, as well as the relative unimportance—at least, in the context of representing Syria—of the material on other pre-Islamic prophets that appears solely in their biographical entries. The Syria represented in the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* was not, therefore, an “abode of the prophets,” as it had been described by geographers and *faḍā’il* authors up to Ibn ‘Asakir’s time, a description that implicated Syria in the birth and development of Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam.⁴⁴ Instead, Ibn ‘Asakir’s Syria was an exclusively Islamic Syria, defined by its importance to the early community of believers under Muhammad, to the expansion of

Islam, and to the ultimate showdown between faithful Muslims and infidels at the end of time.

Despite Ibn ‘Asakir’s clear antipathy toward the Crusader presence in Syria and his favoring of traditions intended to inspire rightly guided Muslims to fight infidels in their midst, he did not make the Crusader occupation of Jerusalem a cause célèbre for his call to arms nor did he represent Jerusalem as the sine qua non of Syrian sanctity. Upholding Jerusalem’s status as an Islamic holy site in the same category as Mecca or Medina had been the overriding concern of the 11th-century *faḍā’il* treatises on Jerusalem, and the city’s divinely privileged status dominated representations of the region of Syria in medieval geographical literature.⁴⁵ By contrast, although Jerusalem, like Jesus, appears throughout Ibn ‘Asakir’s *faḍā’il al-Sham* in apocalyptic traditions, and thus possessed clear eschatological significance, the city remained but a symbol of promise for the end of time rather than a dominant and current source of Syria’s Islamic prestige. The few spots in which Ibn ‘Asakir mentioned Jerusalem in a nonapocalyptic context occur primarily in a chapter placed a third of the way through the *faḍā’il* citing commentary on Qur’anic references to God’s blessed or holy land (Q. 21:71, 5:21, 7:137).⁴⁶ However, taking into account Ibn ‘Asakir’s strategies of repetition, the traditions pinpointing the source of Syria’s holiness in Jerusalem or in Palestine should be seen as variants,⁴⁷ included by virtue of the scholarly thoroughness that marks the work as a whole, on the far more numerous interpretations of the scriptural holy land as “al-Sham.”⁴⁸ Overall the toponym that dominates the *faḍā’il* is “al-Sham,” with “Dimashq” a distant second. Mecca and Medina, the regions of Egypt and Iraq, and the Syrian city of Homs received mention at least as often as did Jerusalem or Palestine. Furthermore, unlike earlier *faḍā’il* authors, Ibn ‘Asakir did not cite the Qur’anic verse describing the Prophet Muhammad’s “Night Journey” (Q. 17:1) to the Masjid al-Aqsa, interpreted as Jerusalem by many authoritative exegetes up to Ibn ‘Asakir’s time,⁴⁹ nor did he include the well-known “hadith of the three mosques,” intended to legitimize the pious visitation of Jerusalem’s sanctuary alongside those of Mecca and Medina.⁵⁰ This neglect of the two most frequently cited pieces of evidence for Jerusalem’s sanctity in an earlier discourse of place suggests a deliberate downplaying of the sanctity its presence conferred on Ibn ‘Asakir’s Syria.

To characterize Ibn ‘Asakir on the basis of the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* as a “propagandiste de la sainteté de Jérusalem et de la Terre Sainte”⁵¹ is, therefore, to misread or overlook strategies of selection, repetition, and placement. In fact, Ibn ‘Asakir’s downplaying of Jerusalem was consistent with his downplaying of pre-Islamic history in the representation of Syria. The material in circulation at the time praising Jerusalem as a holy city derived mainly from the shared historical and legendary heritage of monotheism. Much of this material would not necessarily have appealed to a strict hadith scholar, nor would it have facilitated the rejection of non-Muslim claims, particularly those of European Christians, to Syrian territory based on its biblical past. Furthermore, given Crusader control of Jerusalem for the duration of his lifetime, Ibn ‘Asakir must have seen little use in making Jerusalem the focus of his immediate political and religious aspirations for Syria or in encouraging Muslim pilgrimage to the holy city. Although Ibn ‘Asakir was reported to have authored an independent *faḍā’il* treatise on Jerusalem⁵² and certainly was committed to the reestablishment of Muslim rule in the territories under Crusader occupation, it was Damascus to which Ibn ‘Asakir turned in

the second half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* as the center of his representation of Syria.

DAMASCUS AS PLACE: IBN 'ASAKIR'S URBAN TOPOGRAPHY

Apart from scattered references to “Dimashq” in the opening *faḍā'il*, Ibn 'Asakir's representation of his hometown occurs primarily in the urban topography occupying the second half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*. The topography marked Ibn 'Asakir's transition from material celebrating the more abstract virtues of Syria, its Islamic pedigree and apocalyptic destiny, to material celebrating the very concrete virtues of Damascus, virtues stemming from a foundational period as an Islamic capital city under the Umayyad caliphs; from a “ritual topography” replete with destinations for pious visitation; and from a complex and richly urban present to which Ibn 'Asakir's systematic observations testified. When it came to his hometown, Ibn 'Asakir displayed less of the conservatism of a strict hadith scholar. Although he avoided material derived from Syria's pluralistic heritage in his *faḍā'il al-Sham*, in his topography of Damascus he drew from much more varied, late, and local sources and represented the city through the blessings (*baraka*) conferred by shrines and cemeteries, relics and rituals. Furthermore, while Ibn 'Asakir's *faḍā'il* claimed a monopoly on divine prestige for the region of Syria, his topography claimed both sacred and secular distinctions for Damascus. Thus, Damascus emerges from these pages as a living, breathing city that could boast a powerful political past, monumental architecture, holy sites, and a thriving economy.

Ibn 'Asakir devoted the first quarter of the topography to a description of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus and the history of its construction.⁵³ While this section conforms more to a *faḍā'il* format than to that of topography, it signaled a departure from Ibn 'Asakir's representation of Syria in the preceding pages, a representation that consisted primarily of traditions traced back to the lifetime of the Prophet or to that of his Successors. By contrast, his description of the Umayyad Mosque drew from later and more local and partisan sources, as in the opening clarification of the exegesis of God's oath in Qur'an 95:1, “by the fig and the olive.” The exegesis of this verse offered by Ibn 'Asakir earlier in his *faḍā'il al-Sham* interpreted the “fig” as a reference to Damascus and the “olive” as a reference to Jerusalem on the authority of prominent figures within the early Islamic community.⁵⁴ To begin his urban topography, however, Ibn 'Asakir called on Damascene scholars from the 8th and 9th centuries to provide four traditions interpreting “the fig” specifically as the site of the Umayyad Mosque.⁵⁵ In one of these traditions, Muhammad b. Shu'ayb (d. ca. 815), whose grandfather Shabur had been a client of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid I (r. 705–15), invokes the vague authority of “more than one of our elders” to explain this interpretation by claiming that fig trees were seen on the site before al-Walid built the mosque.⁵⁶ This late and patently partisan exegesis set the tone for the subsequent pages, which take an emphasis, already established in the Syrian branch of the discourse of place, on the Umayyad Mosque as the focal point of Damascene topography and expand it into a celebration of the city's political power and Islamic prestige under the Umayyad caliphs.⁵⁷

Central to Ibn 'Asakir's narrative of this chapter of Damascene history were al-Walid's negotiations with the city's Christian community in which he vouchsafed a

group of churches in exchange for the ceding of the Byzantine Church of St. John, future site of the Umayyad Mosque.⁵⁸ When the caliph personally struck the first blow to this church in 706 and ordered the construction of a congregational mosque in its place, he brought to an end nearly seventy years of Muslims and Christians sharing the site for worship.⁵⁹ The subsequent high cost of the Umayyad Mosque's construction and al-Walid's aspirations for the notoriety it would bring Damascus round out Ibn 'Asakir's narrative.⁶⁰ Highlighting this particular episode in the history of the city's most important Islamic monument established interfaith negotiations as integral to the historical ordering of its loci of devotion, but the conclusion of the episode left little ambiguity about religious and political hierarchies under the Umayyads.

A chapter devoted to the famously pious Umayyad Caliph 'Umar II (r. 717–20) and his ascetic objections to the lavish decorations gracing the mosque reinforced the portrayal of Damascene monumental architecture under the Umayyads as reflective of Islamic political power.⁶¹ In an anecdote at the end of the chapter, even the scrupulous 'Umar manages to justify such an ostentatious display. When a group of Byzantines visits the mosque, emissaries from the caliph overhear their awestruck reaction, "Why do you underestimate [the Muslims'] power? Only a great monarch could have built this edifice." On hearing of this reaction to the mosque, 'Umar lays his concerns to rest and says, "Well, if it angers [our] enemies, so be it."⁶² In emphasizing these justifications, Ibn 'Asakir acted as an apologist for Umayyad building projects, especially inasmuch as they impressed on Christian communities both inside and outside of Muslim jurisdiction the power, righteousness, and assured longevity of the Islamic polity. Ibn 'Asakir's use of 8th-century historical material featuring the Byzantine Empire as a Christian rival for Syrian territory echoed the message delivered in the preceding *faḍā'il* that the unity of Muslim-controlled Syria, with the emphasis here on Umayyad Damascus as its capital city, was an essential and urgent prerequisite to the defeat of Syria's, and Islam's, enemies.

As had earlier participants in the discourse of place in and about Syria, Ibn 'Asakir took the Umayyad Mosque as but the starting point for a ritual topography. His enumeration of the many other loci of devotion in the city and its environs distinguished the second half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* from the preceding portrait of Syria by representing Damascus through its manifold attractions for pilgrims and, in so doing, by embracing material of heterodox and popular origins.⁶³ Ibn 'Asakir introduced a chapter on destinations for pious visitation (*ziyāra*), a lesser form of pilgrimage, by quoting a tradition on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As, "There is no Muslim to whom, when he undertakes *ziyāra* on the land or comes to a mosque built of stone and prays in it, the land will not say: Make a request of God Almighty on his land, and I will bear witness for you on the day that you meet Him."⁶⁴ Thus, the land itself, when approached as sacred, becomes an intercessor for humans on the Day of Judgment.

In representing Damascus, Ibn 'Asakir duly approached the land as sacred, reporting on popular practices of *ziyāra* and attributing *baraka* to various sites by virtue of their contact with prophets and other sacred figures of both pre-Islamic and Islamic fame. In the chapters on the Umayyad Mosque, he cited traditions attributing the initial erection of the south wall of the mosque to the pre-Islamic Arab Prophet Hud⁶⁵; recounting the discovery of the head of John the Baptist in a crypt under the foundations of the mosque⁶⁶; and identifying a phantasmic night visitor to the mosque as the legendary immortal

Prophet al-Khidr.⁶⁷ In the chapter devoted to destinations for *ziyāra*, he recounted the full legend of the High Place (*rabwa*) where Jesus and Mary sought refuge in Qur'an 23:50, said to be located in the Ghuta, the fertile oasis extending south and east from the slopes of Mount Qasiyun on the northern outskirts of the city⁶⁸; he made repeated reference to Abraham's relationship with a village called Barza in the Ghuta, allegedly his birthplace as well as site of the Mosque or Station (*maqām*) of Abraham⁶⁹; and he established the mystical significance of Mount Qasiyun and its various shrines, including the Grotto of Blood (*maghārat al-dam*), where Cain was said to have killed Abel.⁷⁰ Finally, he concluded the second half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* with a chapter on the cemeteries of Damascus, listing traditions identifying tombs of illustrious early Islamic personages in the Bab al-Saghir cemetery outside the southern wall of the city.⁷¹ Visitation of tombs had long been a stalwart of popular piety in Islam, and Ibn 'Asakir's Damascus was full of *baraka* of this sort.⁷²

Although the material he furnished on these and other destinations for visitation in and around Damascus reflected less the strict hadith scholar of the opening *faḍā'il al-Sham* and more a long-time Damascene resident well versed in popular practice and legend, Ibn 'Asakir did not lend all of this material the same credence. Describing a Damascene mosque founded by a weaver from Cairo in the early 11th century that allegedly bore the handprint of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Ibn 'Asakir cast doubt on the relic's authenticity. "I heard that when [the founder of the mosque] was asked which hand ['Ali] placed on the rock, he said that it was the right one. However, the impression [in the rock] was from the left hand. It is said that [the founder of the mosque] carved this handprint in the rock [himself]."⁷³ The fact that this mosque was founded by an Egyptian at the height of the Fatimid Caliphate and that he claimed it bore the mark of 'Ali makes it highly likely that it was a site of Shi'i visitation in Damascus.⁷⁴ Since Ibn 'Asakir did not question controversial legendary material locating, for example, Abraham's birthplace in the Ghuta,⁷⁵ his skepticism in this instance should probably be attributed to his antipathy toward Shi'ism. Despite this skepticism and his silence on the subject of other Shi'i holy sites, as well as his limited observations of the ritual practices of Damascene Christians and Jews,⁷⁶ Ibn 'Asakir's ritual topography sprang from the pre-Islamic antiquity and monotheistic heritage of his hometown. Unlike Ibn 'Asakir's Syria, the Damascus that emerged from this topography was truly an "abode of the prophets," a city in which the traces of saints, patriarchs, and caliphs had been etched into its very stones.

In the final three-quarters of the topography, Ibn 'Asakir sketched the impressive dimensions that qualified Damascus as the first city of 12th-century Syria and, in so doing, vividly distinguished the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* from that of the *Ta'rikh Baghdad* and other representatives of an earlier discourse of place. The cataloguing of the Damascene built environment that Ibn 'Asakir presented in these chapters also contradicts conclusions drawn in some secondary literature about the work. According to Rosenthal, "Ibn 'Asakir's introduction was mainly concerned with the relations between Damascus and Muhammad and the early Muslims. Items borrowed from annalistic historiography, such as the story of the introduction of the Muslim era, seemed more important to the author than a factual topographical description such as we find it in the *History of Baghdad*."⁷⁷ This comparison between the topographical introductions of the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* and the *Ta'rikh Baghdad* was echoed by David Morray, "Al-Khatib's introduction consists of a long section containing topographical, cultural

and historical information concerning Baghdad and its suburbs, as well as the story of its foundation. Ibn ‘Asakir, however, finds factual topographical information less interesting than items taken from earlier chronicles, such as the account of the beginning of the Muslim era.⁷⁸ As the discussion later will bear out, these statements misinterpret the topographical material presented in the *Ta’rikh Baghdad* and ignore a large portion of the topographical material Ibn ‘Asakir furnished on Damascus. In fact, the great innovation of the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* was its factual and up to date depiction of the Damascene cityscape.

Ibn ‘Asakir’s chapter inventorying the mosques of Damascus was the first of its kind⁷⁹; in it, he led the reader on a guided tour of the mosques located inside and outside of the walls of the city. All of the material was recorded based on firsthand observation, and the mosques were listed in the order that they occurred along a circuit of Damascus, starting at the westernmost gate of the walled city, Bab al-Jabiya, and continuing eastward along the old Roman Via Recta, taking detours through the southern half of the city to the easternmost gate, Bab Sharqi, then north to Bab Tuma, and then back west along the northern half of the city to conclude at the Umayyad Mosque and the Citadel. For each mosque along the way, Ibn ‘Asakir noted its location, the circumstances of its foundation, and a few defining physical characteristics. A representative series of entries gives an idea of the detail that this chapter conveys:

63. A mosque inside Cheese Street, near Daylam Street. It has an imam, a muezzin, and an endowment.
64. The Mosque of the Blacksmiths. It has an imam, a muezzin, and an endowment.
65. South of it is a mosque near the entrance to Lentil Street, and between the two mosques is a path. Large, with an imam, a muezzin, and an endowment.
66. A second-floor mosque known as the Mosque of the Pearl Market. Large, with an imam, a muezzin, and an endowment. It also has a fountain. It burned down some years ago, and its restoration was begun—May God, glory be to Him the Almighty, facilitate its conclusion. It is one of the old, esteemed mosques. The restorations have been finished, thanks be to God, Lord of the Worlds.⁸⁰

This final remark, that the restorations on the Mosque of the Pearl Market had finally been finished, was evidently added later either by Ibn ‘Asakir himself or by a subsequent author or copyist and suggests that the information supplied here was considered relevant and practical enough to warrant ongoing revisions. The most striking aspect of this chapter, however, is not simply the up to the minute depiction of the numerous mosques of Damascus (some 240 within the walled city alone), but the continuity reflected in that depiction between the sacred and the profane in the city. Residences, markets, and mosques flow one into the other, and street names alone tell a story of a thriving commercial town, the quotidian vocabulary of foodstuffs and commodities demarcating Ibn ‘Asakir’s Damascus.⁸¹

While his mosque inventory was the richest in detail, he also supplied original information on several important features of the Damascene infrastructure. After a series of historical reports addressing the development of a state-controlled water distribution system in late 7th- and early 8th-century Damascus under the Umayyad caliphs, the following rare editorial remark revealed Ibn ‘Asakir’s concern with the prosaic essentials of urban life:

These are the waterways enjoyed by those near and far. Water is distributed from them to the territories in streams from irrigation trenches, and then it enters the town in canals, and the people profit from it for the common good in a pleasant manner, and it branches off to tanks and baths, and it runs in the streets and fountains. That is one of the pleasant advantages, one of the considerable, noble benefits, an obvious, significant virtue, which may be counted among the virtues of this city, since water in most countries is not available except at a price, and it is that which makes possible human life and the removal of dirt.⁸²

Clearly, in the Middle Eastern cities of the 12th century that Ibn 'Asakir had visited the existence of an efficient public water system available to all inhabitants, both rich and poor, could not go without saying. Its existence in Damascus testified to the sophistication and prioritization of municipal planning in Ibn 'Asakir's time and prompted the direct declaration of civic pride quoted earlier. An enumeration of the one hundred-plus water mains and public baths within the walled city of Damascus, plotted along roughly the same itinerary as the mosques, follows this statement.⁸³ Ibn 'Asakir indicated whether the upkeep of each branch of the network was funded by an endowment and noted directions to each site. He also inventoried the gates of Damascus, exhibiting similar concern with the efficiency of the urban infrastructure, this time in terms of the architectural features and recent renovations that enabled the gates to meet the competing needs of commercial intercourse and defense.⁸⁴ In these annotated lists, Ibn 'Asakir emphasized the secular attributes of Damascus that served and strengthened the religious significance of its wealth of mosques and other loci of devotion.

Ibn 'Asakir's topography of Damascus in the second half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* stood out, therefore, not for its lack of factual information, as suggested by the authors quoted earlier, but for its concern with establishing an up-to-date and logically ordered guide to the city. By contrast, the majority of the material with which al-Khatib al-Baghdadi represented Baghdad in the introduction to the *Ta'rikh Baghdad* dates from the late 9th century, depicting the city as it had looked a century and a half before his death.⁸⁵ However, Ibn 'Asakir not only provided inventories of buildings and features of the municipal infrastructure based on firsthand observation, rather than received historical or traditional material,⁸⁶ but he also organized these inventories according to each entry's position along a circuit of the city.⁸⁷ Ibn 'Asakir portrayed his hometown as 12th-century Damascenes encountered it, and his catalogues of its mosques and canals resemble "walking tours" intended to provide a practical guide to the principal landmarks of the city. In his urban topography, therefore, Ibn 'Asakir associated belonging in Damascus with the intimate familiarity of the resident, with a reverence for its Umayyad past, and with a sense of the *baraka* embedded in its stones. These pages acted as a pledge of allegiance to Damascus from one of its most prominent native sons and as a celebration of a city that was, if not untroubled, certainly poised in the second half of the 12th century for better things to come.

CONCLUSION

According to Ibn 'Asakir, the lengthy compilation of the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, a project that he started earlier in life and subsequently despaired of ever finishing, was encouraged and finally completed at the urging of Nur al-Din, "avenger of the vile, infidel enemies of Muslims."⁸⁸ Ever since his triumphant entry into Damascus in 1154,

Nur al-Din had sought to engage the notables of the city, such as the Banu 'Asakir, in his bid for the consolidation of Syria and the expulsion or marginalization of its non-Muslim and non-Sunni elements.⁸⁹ One of the institutional centerpieces of Nur al-Din's policies was the construction of the Dar al-Hadith in Damascus, a bastion of conservative Sunni hadith studies under the direction of none other than Ibn 'Asakir. Moreover, the Zangid prince asserted his authority and strengthened his position in the architecture and infrastructure of his new capital city; Ibn 'Asakir's topography of Damascus lists nine mosques inside and five outside the city walls, two canals, two baths, two gates, and three separate Madrasa al-Nuriyya's, all endowed, renovated, or expanded at the behest of Nur al-Din.⁹⁰ By the time of Nur al-Din's death in 1174, Damascus had become the political capital of the united Muslim-controlled areas of Syria. The last year of Ibn 'Asakir's life was marked by the entry of Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub into Damascus, where he maintained his predecessor's policies, even in his patronage of the city's Sunni elites, as his presence at Ibn 'Asakir's funeral attested.⁹¹ Within a decade, Salah al-Din would wrest Jerusalem from the Crusaders and administer the expanding territories of Muslim Syria from his capital at Damascus. During the last two decades of his life, therefore, Ibn 'Asakir had every reason to feel optimistic about the future of his region and the rising political fortunes of his native town.

Thus, the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* emerged from a particular environment of politics and patronage that came together in Damascus during the second half of the 12th century. Given his family's prominence and his professional relationship with Nur al-Din, Ibn 'Asakir's magnum opus should be seen as the product of a Damascene intellectual fully invested in that environment. While its numerous volumes of biographies certainly shed light on the intellectual orientation of their author and the historical context in which they were composed, as has been demonstrated ably in secondary scholarship to date,⁹² this article argues that the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, a heretofore interpretively neglected aspect of the work, is particularly revealing of Ibn 'Asakir's politics of belonging. In this introduction, Ibn 'Asakir claimed for Syria virtues derived from Islamic historiography and the authoritative methods of a reputable hadith scholar to restrict belonging in the region to those conforming to an increasingly exclusive and militant Sunnism espoused by political rulers, such as Nur al-Din, and religious notables, such as Ibn 'Asakir, and propagated through their combined, often collaborative, efforts.⁹³ In this same text, he claimed for Damascus a heritage of Islamic power as well as the *baraka* associated with ancient history, holy sites, and popular piety, linking belonging in the city to a range of beliefs and ritual practices, if not necessarily to a range of official religious and political affiliations. These representations of Syria and Damascus established Ibn 'Asakir both as an advocate of Nur al-Din's militant and exclusionary plans for Syria and as a Damascene particularist, a proud witness to its distant past, thriving present, and hopeful future.

Ibn 'Asakir presented two series of readings from the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* at the Umayyad Mosque in 1164, installing it as a public text, the import of which rested not only in its composition but also in its reception. A set of surviving audience certificates (*samā'āt*) attests to an attendance of between seventy and eighty-five people for the second series of readings, which occurred on Thursdays and Fridays over a period of a month at the end of the year.⁹⁴ Since a biographical analysis of the individuals listed on the certificates is beyond the scope of this study, it is impossible

here to determine exactly how “public” or “popular” these sessions were, beyond the cursory observation that the lists include various relatives of Ibn 'Asakir as well as titles suggesting membership in the religious elite.⁹⁵ However, readings with more than fifty auditors appear comparably rarely in the preserved body of Damascene *samā'āt* from the mid-12th through the mid-14th centuries, so Ibn 'Asakir's sessions seem to have attracted an above-average attendance.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the Umayyad Mosque was well known at the time as a site of public instruction in the religious sciences, and the fact that many of Ibn 'Asakir's sessions occurred on Fridays, when the mosque attracted a larger and more diverse assortment of visitors than on any other day of the week, makes it likely that these were comparatively conspicuous readings.⁹⁷ Comprising members of the Banu 'Asakir and the ulama for certain, as well as, with likelihood, members of a wider cross section of the population, this group of seventy to eighty-five individuals formed the most immediate audience for the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*. It was to this group of contemporaries that Ibn 'Asakir may have intended the vote of confidence conveyed by his *faḍā'il al-Sham* for Nur al-Din's policies.

In a less immediate, but no less significant, way, the audience for the introduction to Ibn 'Asakir's great biographical dictionary would include future participants in the Syrian branch of the discourse of place, which expanded considerably in the two centuries following the composition of the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*. As argued earlier, Ibn 'Asakir's representations of Syria and Damascus were part of an ongoing discourse among past and future authors of such representations, authors who reproduced material from or responded in common terms to each other's work. The representation of Syria in the first half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* engaged this discourse in the conventional format of a *faḍā'il* treatise. In a departure from the discourse, however, Ibn 'Asakir's representation did not celebrate Jerusalem's centrality to Islamic history or ritual, as representations of Syria would once again and with added intensity during the half-century following the conquest of the city from the Crusaders in 1183.⁹⁸ However, its clear refrain of “Syria for Sunnis,” and its implicit rejection of the para-biblical material that had dominated an earlier discourse of place would be echoed in representations of Syria and Syrian localities over the next century and a half, as Crusaders would continue to threaten and Mongols would soon invade Syrian territory and divide Syrian residents.⁹⁹ As for the second half of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, the attention to topographical detail and the insistence on quotidian familiarity in the representation of Damascus also announced a new emphasis in the discourse of place, as up to date written descriptions of the built and natural environments, including loci of devotion, in and around the cities of Syria would proliferate, heralding a closer identification between city and city dweller under the decentralized politics of the Ayyubid period.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* marked a turning point in the discourse of place in and about Syria, a harbinger of an ideologically exclusive and city-based politics of belonging in the late 12th and 13th centuries.

NOTES

¹ Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 166.

² Aslam ibn Sahl Bahshal (d. 905), *Ta'rikh Wasit*, ed. Kurkis 'Awwad (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Ma'arif, 1967); see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (*El*²), 12 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954–) s.v. “Bahshal” (F. Rosenthal).

³See, for instance, Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970); Nikita Elisséeff, *La description de Damas d'Ibn 'Asakir* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1959); 'Abd al-Qadir Rihawi, "Khitat madinat Dimashq 'ind al-mu'arrikh Ibn 'Asakir," in *al-Kalimat wa-l-buhuth wa-l-qasa'id al-malqa fi al-ihitaf al-bi-mu'arrikh Dimashq al-kabir Ibn 'Asakir* (Damascus: Wizarat al-Ta'lim al-'Ali, 1979), 97–113; David Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and His World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

⁴See, for example, Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, ed., *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993); James Duncan and David Ley, ed., *Place/Culture/Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993); Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, ed., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, N. M.: School of American Research Press, 1996); Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till, ed., *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and David Jacobson, *Place and Belonging in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁵Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, "Introduction," in Carter et al., *Space and Place*, xii.

⁶See my "Place and Belonging in Medieval Syria, 6th/12th–8th/14th Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

⁷For more on the development of local history and biography in the Arabic written tradition, see Rosenthal, *Muslim Historiography*, 150–72; Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1998), 214–28; Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138–42. For more on the field of medieval Arabic geography, see *EP*², s.v. "Djughrafiya" (S. Maqbul Ahmad); André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman*, vols. 1–4 (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1980–2001); and I. I. Krachkovski, *Ta'rikh al-adab al-jughrafi al-'Arabi*, 2 vols., trans. Salah al-Din 'Uthman Hashim (Cairo, 1963–65).

⁸*Fada'il* treatises were also composed on a variety of subjects, such as the Qur'an, the Prophet, the Companions, Arab tribes, months of the Islamic calendar, days of the week, and even various foods. For more on *fada'il* literature, see *EP*², s.v. "Fadila," (R. Sellheim), Ernst August Gruber, *Verdienst und Rang: Die Fada'il als literarisches und gesellschaftliches Problem in Islam*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, vol. 35 (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz, 1975).

⁹For the two extant 11th-century treatises on Jerusalem, see Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, ed. Isaac Hasson (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979); Abu al-Ma'ali al-Musharraf ibn al-Murajja al-Maqdisi, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, ed. Ofer Livne-Kafri (Shfaram: Al Mashreq, 1995). For the 11th-century treatise on Damascus, see Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Raba'i, *Fada'il al-Sham wa-Dimashq*, ed. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Arabi, 1950). On the latter and its relationship to Ibn 'Asakir's *Ta'rikh*, see Paul Cobb, "Virtual Sacrality: Making Muslim Syria Sacred before the Crusades," *Medieval Encounters* 8, 1 (2001): 35–55.

¹⁰This *fada'il* makes up the first volume of the following edition of the introduction to the *Ta'rikh*: Ibn 'Asakir, *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, vol. 1 and vol. 2 (pt. 1), ed. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Arabi, 1951–54) (hereafter, *TMD* 1/2). For an edition of the work in its entirety, see Ibn 'Asakir, *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, vols. 1–80, ed. 'Ali Shiri (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995–2001).

¹¹Fred Donner, "'Uthman and the Rashidun Caliphs in Ibn 'Asakir's *Ta'rikh Madinat Dimashq*: A Study in Strategies of Compilation," in *Ibn 'Asakir and Early Islamic History*, ed. James E. Lindsay (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 2001), 44–61.

¹²The sections devoted to "Dimashq" are confined in the 600-page *fada'il* to *TMD* 1:10–20, 192–233.

¹³There is no evidence for the synonymous usage of "al-Sham" and "Dimashq" in medieval Arabic geographies. See, for instance, Yaqt al-Rumi (d. 1229), *Mu'jam al-buldan*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1957–95), 2:463–70 (on "Dimashq"), 3:311–15 (on "al-Sham"). For English translations of the sections on "al-Sham" from a variety of medieval Arabic geographical works, see Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1890), 14–82. See also Ibn 'Asakir's own etymologies of "al-Sham" and "Dimashq" *TMD* 1:6–20.

¹⁴*TMD* 1:129–30, 133 (on Qur'an 5:21, 7:137, 21:71); see also *ibid.*, 1:152–53 (on Qur'an 29:26). For the location and significance of the town of al-'Arish, see *EP*², s.v. "al-'Arish" (F. Buhl); Yaqt, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, 4:113–14. For the geographies, see Le Strange, *Palestine*, 14–82.

¹⁵The one spot in Ibn 'Asakir's introduction in which a case can be made for the interpretation of "al-Sham" as a smaller entity than that of the region of Syria as defined by the medieval geographers lies in two versions of an exegetical tradition in which "the fig" and "the olive" of Qur'an 95:1 are interpreted as

references to "bilad al-Sham" and "bilad Filasṭīn," respectively (*TMD* 1:203–4); the use of "bilad al-Sham" here and its differentiation from "bilad Filasṭīn" suggests parallelism between the territories of Palestine and those of "al-Sham," a parallelism that is not made in the 9th- and 10th-century geographies in which Palestine is always a subregion of "al-Sham."

¹⁶Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh Baghdad*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1931), 3–69.

¹⁷See the aforementioned *faḍā'il* treatises by al-Wasiti and al-Maqdisi.

¹⁸Al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 1–16 (on "al-Sham"), 17–79 (on "Dimashq").

¹⁹Medieval Arabic geography from as early as the 9th century dealt with either the entire world, broken down into regions or climes, or the Islamic world, similarly broken down: see Maqbul, "Djughrafiya." Even the earliest *faḍā'il* treatises on Egypt were striking for their regional scope. See, for example, Ibn al-Kindi (fl. 966), *Fada'il Misr al-mahrusa*, ed. 'Ali Muhammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1997).

²⁰*TMD* 1:47–90.

²¹See al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 4–6 (for an analysis of the derivation of this tradition, see the second appendix, 91–92); al-Maqdisi, *Fada'il*, 310, 313 (for a full list of the works that include a version of this tradition, see the editor's annotation).

²²Wilferd Madelung, "'Has the Hijra Come to an End?'" *Revue des etudes islamiques* 54 (1986): 228.

²³*Ibid.*, 235.

²⁴*TMD* 1:364–598.

²⁵This phrase is borrowed from Rosenthal, *Muslim Historiography*, 25.

²⁶For an example, see Nu'aym ibn Hammad (d. 842), *Kitab al-fitan*, ed. Majdi ibn al-Mansur ibn Sayyid al-Shura (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997). For more on this collection of apocalyptic traditions and its relevance for Umayyad and Abbasid Syria, see Wilferd Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Hims in the Umayyad Age," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31, 2 (1986): 141–85; *idem.*, "The Sufyani between Tradition and History," *Studia Islamica* 63 (1986): 4–48; Paul Cobb, *White Banners: Contention in Abbasid Syria, 750–880* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 55–65. For a short discussion of some of the apocalyptic traditions quoted by Ibn 'Asakir, see Jorge Bofill, "Ba'd al-ahadith fi al-nubu'at wa-l-malahim 'an Dimashq," in *al-Kalimat wa-l-buhuth wa-l-qasa'id*, 115–19.

²⁷*TMD* 1:91–102 (variants of this hadith differ considerably).

²⁸Material praising Syria explicitly at the expense of Egypt, as well as Iraq (which displaced Syria as center of the Islamic world when a proto-Shi'i revolution replaced the Umayyad Caliphate based in Damascus with the Abbasid Caliphate based in Baghdad in 750), appears throughout the *faḍā'il*, echoing sentiments expressed in earlier works. See, for instance, *TMD* 1:109, 119–28, 138, 147–48, 277–79, 288–89, 302, 303–4, 314, 316, 320, 498, 557. For comparison, see al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 11–12, 14–15, 44–45; al-Maqdisi, *Fada'il*, 52–53, 55, 309, 311, 317, 321, 331–32.

²⁹*TMD* 1:321. The *abdāl* were believed to be a mystical group of God's chosen. Whenever one of them died, another would be substituted for him or her. Forty of these substitutes were said to live in Syria. See also *TMD* 1:277–91. For more on the *abdāl*, see *EF*², s.v. "Abdal" (I. Goldziher and H. J. Kissling.)

³⁰This apocalyptic hadith occurred in the context of an entire chapter of apologia for Siffin: *TMD* 1:321–27.

³¹*Ibid.*, 1:240–49; on variants, see *ibid.*, 250–57, 292–95; on related traditions, see *ibid.*, 258–62, 296–302.

³²*Ibid.*, 1:213–218.

³³*Ibid.*, 1:599–620.

³⁴For one example, see *ibid.*, 1:618.

³⁵For more on Ibn 'Asakir's education and background, see *EF*², s.v. "Ibn 'Asakir" (N. Elisséeff); James E. Lindsay, "Ibn 'Asakir, His *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* and Its Usefulness for Understanding Early Islamic History," in *idem*, *Ibn 'Asakir and Early Islamic History*, 1–18.

³⁶For more information on this para-biblical lore, see *EF*², s.v. "Isra'iliyyat" (G. Vajda); *ibid.*, s.v. "Kisas al-anbiya'" (T. Nagel). *Faḍā'il* literature on Egypt was also marked by an emphasis on the pre-Islamic period, by turns apologetic for and proud of its Pharaonic past. The *Ta'rikh Baghdad*, however, contained virtually no references to the period before its foundation by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur in 762.

³⁷See, for examples, al-Wasiti, *Fada'il*, 6, 8–10, 17–19, 35–37, 84; al-Maqdisi, *Fada'il*, 12–26.

³⁸The following constituted the only major sections in the first volume that dealt with the pre-Islamic period or para-biblical material: *TMD* 1:6–30 (on the derivation of the toponyms "al-Sham" and "Dimashq" from antiquity); 135–42, 155–62 (on Qur'anic accounts of episodes from the Old Testament dealing with Syria); 354–63 (on the Byzantine and Persian wars in Syria on the eve of the Islamic conquest).

³⁹See James E. Lindsay, “‘Ali Ibn ‘Asakir as a Preserver of *Qisas al-Anbiya*’: The Case of David b. Jesse,” *Studia Islamica* 85, 2 (1995): 45–82. For a list of the pre-Islamic prophets whose biographies were included in the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq*, see “Appendix D,” in Lindsay, *Ibn ‘Asakir and Early Islamic History*, 144–46.

⁴⁰For comparison, see the litany of merits with which the famous geographer Shams al-Din al-Muqaddasi (d. 1000) opened his chapter on the region of Syria: Shams al-Din al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-taqasim fi ma’rifat al-aqalim*, vol. 3, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 151.

⁴¹He also included a short exegetical chapter locating the High Place (*rabwa*) where Jesus and Mary sought refuge in Qur’an 23:50 in Damascus, *TMD* 1:192–202.

⁴²Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 25.

⁴³Suleiman A. Mourad makes a similar point with respect to Ibn ‘Asakir’s selection of material for his biography of Jesus; see Suleiman A. Mourad, “Jesus According to Ibn ‘Asakir,” in Lindsay, *Ibn ‘Asakir and Early Islamic History*, 24–43.

⁴⁴See, for an example, al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-taqasim*, 151. Although Ibn ‘Asakir did make reference to the phrase “abode of the prophets (*qarār li-l-anbiyā*)” once in the 600-page *faḍā’il* (*TMD* 1:141), it stands as an anomaly in a representation of Syria otherwise undistinguished by prophets other than Muhammad and Jesus.

⁴⁵See, for example, al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-taqasim*, 151, 165–73; Ibn al-Faqih (d. after 903), *Kitab al-buldan*, vol. 5, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 93–102.

⁴⁶*TMD* 1:129–42.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 1:129, 132–34, 140–42.

⁴⁸The same argument can be made with reference to Ibn ‘Asakir’s chapter on jihad (*ibid.*, 1:269–76) in which he supplied multiple traditions celebrating Syria and Syrian cities, fortresses, and frontier outposts (in general, without specification) as the sanctified loci of the wagers of jihad. Only one tradition—an alternative version of another tradition at that specifies Jerusalem in particular as a locus of jihad (*ibid.*, 1:270). The only other nonapocalyptic references to Jerusalem occur in a brief exegetical section taking God’s oath in Qur’an 95:1, “by the fig and the olive,” to refer to either Syria and Palestine or to Damascus and Jerusalem respectively (*ibid.*, 1:203–6) and in a short litany of traditions relating to the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem (*ibid.*, 1:557), as well as in certain isolated traditions (*ibid.*, 1:110, 154, 211).

⁴⁹For more on the “Night Journey,” see *ET*², s.v. “Mi’radj” (B. Schrieke [J. Horovitz]). For examples from earlier *faḍā’il* literature, see al-Wasiti, *Fada’il*, 61–62, 72–76, 94–102; al-Maqdisi, *Fada’il*, 7, 119–23, 251–52.

⁵⁰For more on this hadith, see M. J. Kister, “‘You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques,’ A Study of an Early Tradition,” *Le Muséon* 82 (1969): 173–96. For citations of this hadith in earlier *faḍā’il* literature, see al-Wasiti, *Fada’il*, 4–5; al-Maqdisi, *Fada’il*, 82–85. The earlier works also included detailed instructions as to the appropriate ritual practices for Muslim visitors to undertake in Jerusalem, which are also absent from Ibn ‘Asakir’s *Ta’rikh*. For a quasi “pilgrimage guide” in an 11th-century *faḍā’il* treatise, see al-Maqdisi, *Fada’il*, 64–81.

⁵¹Sivan, *L’Islam et la Croisade* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1968), 64.

⁵²He was also reported to have composed a *faḍā’il* work on Ascalon and a collection of forty hadiths proclaiming the religious merits of jihad. Since these works have not survived, it is impossible to tell what kind of material Ibn ‘Asakir used to represent Jerusalem. See *TMD* 1:28–30, 39–40 (editor’s introduction); see also Ibn ‘Asakir’s biography in Yaqut, *Mu’jam al-udaba’*, vol. 13 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’mun, 1936), 73–87.

⁵³For a discussion of this section, see Ahmad Ramadan Ahmad, “al-Masjid al-Umawi bi-Dimashq bayn al-haqiqa wa-l-ustura,” in *al-Kalimat wa-l-buhuth wa-l-qasa’id*, 155–94.

⁵⁴*TMD* 1:203–6. The sources for this exegesis included the Prophet’s cousin ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas (d. 687), the early convert from Judaism Ka’b al-Ahbar (d. 654–55), and the Iraqi Successor Qatada ibn Di‘ama (d. ca. 735).

⁵⁵*TMD* 2:6. Notes for the second half of the introduction to the *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq* will also cite the extensively annotated French translation of Ibn ‘Asakir’s urban topography: Nikita Elisséeff, ed. and trans., *La description de Damas* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1959), 9–11.

⁵⁶*TMD* 2:6; Elisséeff, *Description*, 10.

⁵⁷For an earlier description of the Umayyad Mosque, borrowed and expanded on by Ibn ‘Asakir, see al-Raba’i, *Fada’il*, 36–43.

⁵⁸*TMD* 2:17–24; Elisséeff, *Description*, 27–38. For a list of the churches al-Walid vouchsafed, see Ibn 'Asakir's chapter on the churches of Damascus: *TMD* 2:126–32; Elisséeff, *Description*, 215–25.

⁵⁹For a discussion of this controversial episode, see Elisséeff, *Description*, 32, n. 1; see also K. A. C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, ed. James W. Allan (Cairo: American University Press, 1989), 46–72.

⁶⁰*TMD* 2:25–39; Elisséeff, *Description*, 39–59.

⁶¹*TMD* 2:40–44; Elisséeff, *Description*, 61–66.

⁶²*TMD* 2:44; Elisséeff, *Description*, 66.

⁶³See Janine Sourdel-Thomine, "Les anciens lieux de pèlerinage damascains," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 14 (1952–54): 65–85.

⁶⁴*TMD* 2:96; Elisséeff, *Description*, 177.

⁶⁵*TMD* 2:8–9; Elisséeff, *Description*, 12–14. See also al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 34–35. For more on Hud, messenger to the ancient tribe of the 'Ad, see *El²*, s.v. "Hud" (A. J. Wensinck and Ch. Pellat).

⁶⁶*TMD* 2:10–11; Elisséeff, *Description*, 14–17. See also al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 31–33. For more on Yahya ibn Zakariyya, John the Baptist of the Islamic tradition, in this context, see Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 200–1.

⁶⁷*TMD* 2:13; Elisséeff, *Description*, 19–20. See also al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 30. For more on the legend of al-Khidr, see *El²*, s.v. "al-Khadir" (A. J. Wensinck).

⁶⁸*TMD* 2:97–98; Elisséeff, *Description*, 178–80. See also al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 53–55. For more on the *rabwa*, see Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 55–56. For alternative interpretations of the location of the *rabwa*, see Mourad, "Jesus According to Ibn 'Asakir," 27–28, nn. 10–12.

⁶⁹*TMD* 2:99–101; Elisséeff, *Description*, 180–84. See also al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 69–70. For more on Barza and the "Damascene cult of Ibrahim," see Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 195–98.

⁷⁰*TMD* 2:101–13; Elisséeff, *Description*, 184–99. See also al-Raba'i, *Fada'il*, 56–59, 62–68. For more on Mount Qasiyun as a pilgrimage site, see Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 47–55.

⁷¹*TMD* 2:195–200; Elisséeff, *Description*, 309–16. The tombs Ibn 'Asakir identified in this cemetery include those of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, founder of the Umayyad dynasty (d. 680); Aws ibn Aws, Companion of the Prophet (d. 679); Abu al-Darda', Companion and religious scholar (d. 652); Umm al-Darda', his wife; Umm Habiba, sister of Mu'awiya and wife of the Prophet (d. 664); and Bilal ibn Rabah, the Prophet's muezzin (d. 641).

⁷²See Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 101–8.

⁷³*TMD* 2:114; Elisséeff, *Description*, 200.

⁷⁴This mosque was not listed in the pilgrimage guide by Ibn 'Asakir's junior contemporary 'Ali al-Harawi (d. 1215), but al-Harawi, who routinely included Shi'i holy sites in his guide, did list other sites associated with a handprint of 'Ali: al-Harawi, *Kitab al-isharat ila ma'rifat al-ziyarat*, ed. Janine Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1953), 65, 66, 70, 76; idem, *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage*, ed. and trans. Janine Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), 146, 148, 155, 172, 173. On Shi'i pilgrimage sites in Syria, see Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 157–61.

⁷⁵See Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, 1:382–83. See also the critical commentary on this and other sites listed by Ibn 'Asakir in al-Harawi, *Kitab al-isharat*, 10–16; idem, *Guide*, 24–40.

⁷⁶*TMD* 2:126–32 (a chapter on the churches of Damascus), 64, 129, 131 (brief references to synagogues); Elisséeff, *Description*, 215–25 (churches), 106, 220, 222–23 (synagogues).

⁷⁷Rosenthal, *Muslim Historiography*, 169–70.

⁷⁸Murray, *Ayyubid Notable*, 11.

⁷⁹*TMD* 2:53–95; Elisséeff, *Description*, 81–176.

⁸⁰*TMD* 2:61; Elisséeff, *Description*, 98–99.

⁸¹Historians have been slow to mine this wealth of detail for information about economic and social life in Damascus in the 12th century. For two examples, see Nikita Elisséeff, "Corporations de Damas sous Nur al-Din; matériaux pour une topographie économique de Damas au XIIe siècle," *Arabica* 3, 1 (1956): 61–79; Khalid Mu'adh, "Dimashq fi ayyam Ibn 'Asakir," in *al-Kalimat wa-l-buhuth wa-l-qasa'id*, 121–54.

⁸²*TMD* 2:152; Elisséeff, *Description*, 255.

⁸³*TMD* 2:154–64; Elisséeff, *Description*, 257–85.

⁸⁴*TMD* 2:185–87; Elisséeff, *Description*, 297–301.

⁸⁵Lassner, *Topography*, 31–34, 41.

⁸⁶Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's chapter on the mosques of Baghdad was almost entirely based on historical reports or other information ascribed to earlier authorities: see al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh*, 1:107–11; Lassner, *Topography*, 95–99.

⁸⁷Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's chapter on the canals of Baghdad was organized according to their physical layout, but, like the rest of his topography, it was based on early 10th-century information and failed to note changes that postdated his sources: see al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh*, 1:111–15; Lassner, *Topography*, 33–34, 100–4.

⁸⁸TMD 1:4.

⁸⁹For the career of Nur al-Din, see Nikita Elisséeff, *Nur ad-Din*, 3 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1967).

⁹⁰TMD 2:62–63, 68, 70, 74, 76, 77, 78 (mosques inside walls), 81, 87, 90–91 (mosques outside walls), 154–55 (canals), 74, 162 (baths), 186 (gates), 74, 76–77 (madrasas); Elisséeff, *Description*, 103–4, 116, 120, 131, 136–39 (mosques inside walls), 146–47, 160, 167–68 (mosques outside walls), 258–59 (canals), 130, 278–79 (baths), 299–300 (gates), 131, 136–37 (madrasas). For more on Nur al-Din's architectural patronage, see Elisséeff, "Les monuments de Nur ad-Din," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 13 (1949–50): 5–43.

⁹¹Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-udaba'*, 13:75.

⁹²See the essays collected in Lindsay, *Ibn 'Asakir and Early Islamic History*. See also Lindsay, "'Ali Ibn 'Asakir as a Preserver of *Qisas al-Anbiya'*"; idem, "Caliphal and Moral Exemplar? 'Ali Ibn 'Asakir's Portrait of Yazid b. Mu'awiya," *Der Islam* 74, 2 (1997): 250–78; idem, "Damascene Scholars during the Fatimid Period: An Examination of 'Ali b. 'Asakir's *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*," *Al-Masaq* 7 (1994): 35–75.

⁹³Yasser Tabbaa calls this period in Syria the "Sunni revival," though the phrase is more often associated with Iraq under the Seljuks: see Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

⁹⁴See TMD 1:624–26, 635–37, 645–47, 657–59, 667–69, 676–78, 685–87, 693–95, 702–4, 714–15. For audience certificates from the first series of readings in early 1164 (which were far more sparsely attended), see TMD 1:58, 116, 182, 246, 310, 372, 428, 489, 560, 620. No audience certificates accompanied the two manuscripts from which the editor of the edition under study transcribed the second half of the introduction dealing with Damascene topography, which of course does not mean that this material was not presented at the mosque as well: see TMD 2:14 (editor's introduction). For more on the form and purpose of audience certificates, see *El²*, s.v. "Sama'" (R. Sellheim).

⁹⁵For discussions of the nature and importance of oral presentations of scholarly works in Damascus and Cairo over the two centuries following Ibn 'Asakir's death, as well as speculation as to just how "public" these presentations were, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21–43, 201–16; Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133–51.

⁹⁶See Stefan Leder, Yasin Muhammad al-Sawwas, and Ma'mun al-Sagharji, ed., *Mu'jam al-sama'at al-Dimashqiyya*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1996–2000). See also Leder, "Charismatic Scripturalism: The Hanbali Maqdisis of Damascus," *Der Islam* 74 (1997): 288–92.

⁹⁷When the famous Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr visited Damascus in 1184, he noted that a "great assembly (*mujtama'* *'as'zim*)" gathered at the Umayyad Mosque every day of the week after morning prayers to hear the seven parts of the Qur'an (*sub'*) read aloud, suggesting that the mosque was a public place frequented daily by a cross-section of Damascenes: see Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d.), 244. Decrees and other public announcements were made after Friday prayers in the Umayyad Mosque during the reign of Nur al-Din; for one example, which makes it clear that the assembly in the mosque contained large numbers of people from all walks of Damascene life, see Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, repr. ed. and trans. H. A. R. Gibb (New York: Dover Publications, 2002 [1932]), 321.

⁹⁸The work that marked this turning point was 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani (d. 1201), *al-Fath al-qussi fi al-fath al-Qudsi* (Cairo: Mustafa Fahmi al-Kutubi, 1904). The tendency to interpret Ibn 'Asakir as part of this later wave of propagandists for Jerusalem's sanctity, exemplified in Emmanuel Sivan's *L'Islam et la Croisade*, comes from reading the more copious Ayyubid-era sources back into the discourse of place for the Zangid period.

⁹⁹For one example, see 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sulami (d. 1262), *Tarhib ahl al-Islam fi sukna al-Sham*, ed. Iyad Khalid al-Tabba' (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1998). For a later example, see Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328) famous essay on the pious visitation of Jerusalem and his lesser known essays on the merits of Syria in the *Majmu' fatawa Ibn Taymiyya*, vol. 27 (Cairo: Harf CD-ROM, 1999), 5–24, 39–47, 505–11.

¹⁰⁰For two prominent examples, see the topographical introduction to Kamal al-Din ibn al-‘Adim’s (d. 1262) biographical dictionary for Aleppo, *Bughyat al-talab fī ta’rikh Halab*, vol. 1, ed. Suhayl Zakkar (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), and ‘Izz al-Din ibn Shaddad’s (d. 1285) historical topographies of the cities of Syria, which borrow extensively from Ibn ‘Asakir on Damascus, *al-A‘laq al-khatira fī dhikr umara’ al-Sham wa-l-Jazira*, vol. 1, pt. 1, ed. Dominique Sourdel (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1953); idem, vol. 1, pts. 1–2, ed. Yahya Zakariyya ‘Abbara (Damascus: Manshurat Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1991); idem, *Ta’rikh madinat Dimashq*, ed. Sami al-Dahhan (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1956); idem, *Ta’rikh Lubnan wa-l-Urdunn wa-Filastin*, ed. Sami al-Dahhan (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1963).